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THE NATIONALITY QUESTION IN THE SOVIET UNION

by

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The Soviet Union's problem children are the numerous peoples subjugated by it, and the question of how to reduce their troublemaking potential and friction has been on the minds of Soviet leaders since the first of these peoples was incorporated into the Soviet Union by force.

At first, "Great-Russian chauvinism" was recognized as the main obstacle to the implementation of the Soviet nationality policies, but later, after Stalin had unleashed a purge against the national leaders of the various republics, "bourgeois nationalism" became the Soviet bête noire in this sphere.

In the new Party program, nationalism is condemned as "injurious to the general interest of socialist collaboration" when it occurs within the Soviet bloc. The passages of the document dealing with the nationality question are designed to increase the dependence of non-Russian republics on Moscow. Soviet patriotism is to replace national patriotism. Though the Kremlin's approach to the ultimate solution of the nationality question has so far been cautious, it is clear that Soviet ideologists will one day declare national structures to be outmoded. Russification, introduction of Russian as the national language of all Soviet peoples, and large-scale population shifts are the main tools which the ideologists use to prepare for this final step, which they hope to take at the threshold of Communism.

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The newly approved Party program lays great emphasis on the nationality question in the Soviet Union, which has "more than 100 nations and national minorities" (Pravda, November 2, 1961). Since many of these peoples were incorporated into the Soviet "Federal Republic" by armed force, it is not surprising that the thorny nationality problem still troubles the Soviet leaders today.

From the beginning, as a Soviet historian has admitted, "the various kinds of bourgeois organizations and national governments of every possible description which sprang up on the periphery after the February Revolution became a barrier in the path of the Socialist revolution" (O. I. Chistyakov, Vzaimootnosheniya Sovetskikh Respublik Do Obrazovaniya USSR, Mutual Relations Between The Soviet Republics Prior To The Formation Of The USSR, Moscow, 1955, p. 10). To remove this barrier, Chistyakov wrote, "the Russian workers and peasantry--led by the Bolsheviks--gave effective aid to the oppressed peoples of Russia to liberate them from the yoke of the local bourgeois-nationalist counter-revolution." However, since the minority peoples were hardly likely to distinguish between "liberation" by Moscow and the colonialist policy of the Tsarist Empire, the Soviet leaders recognized that they would have to tread carefully. As early as 1921 the Tenth Party Congress stressed that the Party must combat not only a "bourgeois nationalist" deviation but also manifestations of "great-Russian chauvinism," in other words, efforts by the Russians to suppress the national activities of non-Russian groups. As the Party admitted, if relics of colonialism and nationalism were not eliminated, it would be impossible to form on the periphery of the Soviet state "strong, truly Communist organizations... welding together the non-Russian and Russian peoples on a basis of internationalism" (CPSU In Resolutions, Part 1, pp. 562-63).

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At the Sixteenth Party Congress in 1930, Stalin himself emphasized that in the nationality question "great-Russian chauvinism" posed "the main danger" (*Ibid.*, p. 377) and that "talk about the superiority of Russian culture and its inevitable triumph over the cultures of more backward peoples" was "nothing short of an attempt to entrench domination by the Great-Russian nation" (*Ibid.*, p. 713). At the 1934 Party Congress four years later, the Party line had swung around, Stalin had unleashed a purge of national Communist leaders in the Union republics, and "bourgeois nationalism" was proclaimed to be the "main danger," especially in the Ukraine. Since then there has been little or no reference to "great-Russian chauvinism" in official Soviet sources.

The new Party program does call for "irreconcilable struggle against all relics of nationalism and chauvinism, against tendencies toward national exclusiveness and toward idealization of the past" (*Pravda*, November 2, 1961), but the nationality policy of the program contains many elements that in earlier days would have been described as "great-power chauvinism." According to the program, nationalism is to be condemned as "injurious to the general interests of socialist collaboration" when it is manifested within the Soviet bloc. In such a case it is "the main political and ideological weapon used by international reaction and remnants of internal reactionary forces against the unity of the socialist countries" (*Pravda*, November 2, 1961). On the other hand, the program has nothing but praise for nationalism in the non-Communist world: "In the nationalism of oppressed nations there is a common democratic content against oppression, and Communists support it, considering it justified at a certain stage" (*Ibid.*). The last phrase apparently restricts support to those nationalist movements that are directed against "Western imperialism."

While the program pays lip service to the "consolidations of the sovereignty" of the Soviet national republics, its policy of bringing these republics into "ever closer fraternal collaboration for the purpose of general consolidation of the USSR" (*Pravda*, November 2, 1961) means increasing their subordination to Moscow. During the past year there have been frequent and harsh attacks in the Soviet press on alleged attempts by certain Soviet republics to place their own economic interests above those of the Soviet state. This "crime" is described variously as "localism," "national egoism," or "tendency to autarky." The Party demands that every Soviet citizen become imbued with the principle of working in the "general state interest." Soviet patriotism must replace national patriotism:

In the consciousness of the Soviet man, the main place belongs not to the feeling of national aloofness or to the sense of belonging to this or that nation, but to the sense that he is a citizen of the great Soviet country, a member of a single family of builders of Communism (*Partiynaya Zhizn*, No. 19, 1961, p. 26).

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This demand has been formulated recently in sociological terms by a corresponding member of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, M. Kammari, who advances the concept of a "single Soviet people":

Development of socialist division of labor among the national republics and oblasts has merged the nations of the USSR into a single multi-national whole, into a single and at the same time multi-national Soviet people, sharing a common territory and economic life, common psychological traits manifesting themselves in the community of a single socialist republic (Voprosy Filosofii, No. 9, 1961).

This is a completely new theory; Lenin, who expected national differences to remain a "very, very long time, even after the universal establishment of the world proletariat" (Works, 3rd Ed., Moscow, Vol. 25, p. 227), never made any reference to supranational "transitional communities" as a stage on the road to the full unity of mankind under Communism. The new Party program itself goes no further than to state that the nations of the Soviet Union have acquired "spiritual features in common" and an "international culture." But the implications are clear: Soviet ideologists are moving toward a position in which they can declare nationhood to be outmoded at the threshold of Communism. At the moment, however, an effort is being made to keep in step with Lenin's view on the ultimate development of the nationality question, and the Party program cautiously reminds that "obliteration of national differences is a considerably longer process than the obliteration of class boundaries" (Pravda, November 2, 1961).

There is a definite tendency to limit the development of national cultures within "new historical communities" in favor of an "international culture," based on the particular national culture which can best perform the functions "... of the international community." This is simply a roundabout way of saying that in the Soviet Union the Russian language and culture are to become dominant at the expense of the non-Russian languages and cultures. The Russian language is to be the means of communication between all the peoples of the USSR and also the instrument by which world culture will be brought within reach of all the non-Russian nations and nationalities:

The Russian language, which is the national tongue of the Russians and the common international tongue of all the peoples of the USSR, uniting them in the process of economic, political and cultural co-operation and intercourse, creates a new linguistic community, broader than the community of a national language, and embracing all these multi-national communities (Voprosy Filosofii, No. 9, 1961, pp. 35-36).

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The practical result of this kind of policy is discrimination against the other languages of the Soviet Union. Recent Soviet statistical data reveal, for instance, that in 1959 there were 3,359,000 "extra-territorial" Ukrainians in the Russian Republic, of whom 45.4 per cent, or about one and a half million, used Ukrainian as their first language. Yet this large group has no Ukrainian schools or press. And the same applies to the republic's 300,000 Belorussians, the 500,000 ethnic Germans, the 35,000 Kazakhs and 100,000 Poles and members of other national minorities.

The statement in Pravda (March 3, 1961) that "with every passing year the Union Republics are constantly becoming more multi-national" shows that the Soviet leaders intend to solve the nationality question by so mixing the populations of the national republics that the indigenous populations will become minorities and will eventually lose their national identity. Although it is claimed that the increasing mobility of the Soviet population stems from purely economic causes, associated particularly with the drive to industrialize Siberia and the campaign to cultivate the virgin lands, it is clear that Moscow also has political reasons for changing the ethnic map of the USSR. For instance, the manpower needs of any particular republic are met largely by drafting labor from other parts of the Soviet Union while large sections of the indigenous population are sent to work outside their native area. The official reason given for this procedure is that "the growing scale of Communist construction demands a constant interchange of cadres among the nations" (Pravda, November 2, 1961), but the large-scale application of such a policy in such critical areas as the Baltic republics, where survivals of "bourgeois nationalism" seem to be particularly tenacious, shows that this is not the whole story. That warnings against "bourgeois nationalism" are becoming more, rather than less, frequent in the Soviet press also indicates that the Soviet leaders still have a long way to go to achieve the aims of their nationality policy.

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